

## 525 KILLED

### Theatre Horror in Chicago.

### IROQUOIS BURNED.

### Matinee Audience in a Trap.

### FUMES KILL SCORES.

### The Victims Mostly Women and Children.

### FIRE CURTAIN DIDN'T WORK.

### Hundreds Trampled to Death in a Stampede.

Electric Spark From a Broken Wire Started the Blaze—Draught Swept the Flames Almost Instantly Into the Auditorium—Asbestos Curtain Came Down Part Way, and Increased the Draught—Eddie Foy, Star of "Mr. Bluebeard," the Piece Being Played, Tried to Alay the Panic—Then He Warned the Company, and Got Them All Out Safely—Aldes and Stairways Became Choked Quickly—Fire Exits Not Adequate—Terrible Panic on the Streets—Details of the Horror.

CHICAGO, Dec. 30.—More than 500 persons, mostly women and children, perished by fire in the Iroquois Theatre this afternoon. At midnight the police estimated the number of the dead at 525.

The fire began to smoulder at the human lives about 3:35 o'clock, while a matinee performance of "Mr. Bluebeard" was being played. In the midst of the soothing strains of the "Moonlight Song," an electric spark from a broken wire shot into the flies and an explosion followed. Then a panic ensued.

From that time on until the flames filled the place the death crush continued. A mass of humanity was jammed into the balcony stairway, surrounded by smoke and flames. The mass soon settled back into a death pose, and there they were found by firemen. Trucks, express wagons and patrol wagons were all in use carrying away the bodies.

The asbestos curtain in the theatre would not work, and the flames swept at once to the pit and adjoining walls. All the exits were soon choked by frantic women and children, and those on the inside, terrified at the advancing flames and smoke, were unable to move either way. Late in the afternoon children were taken from the ruins, some burned to a crisp and others trampled beyond recognition. Women by the score were found in a tangled and scorched mass near the stairway.

**FIRE CAME IN A MOONLIGHT SCENE.**  
The theatre was almost in darkness in the second act. The stage was lighted only by the soft artificial beams from the calcium, which lent beauty to the scene during the singing of the "Moonlight Song" by the double sextette. A flash of flame shot across through the filmy draperies, started by a spark.

A slow girl screamed hysterically. The singers stopped short, but with presence of mind the director increased the volume of the music. Scores rose in their seats as the stage manager shouted an order for the continuation of the song. It was obeyed with feeble hearts. The girls forced the words from their throats until two of their number swooned.

The audience could no longer be controlled. Eddie Foy then rushed from the wings to the footlights, but his words of reassurance were in vain. Clouds of smoke poured from the stage into the auditorium, enveloping the struggling mass of panic-stricken men, women and children. Behind the scenes all was confusion. It required but a moment to perceive that the fire had gone too far to be conquered by the amateur fire brigade formed by the stage hands. In the dressing rooms as high as the sixth story were the score of girls of the ballet. At the first alarm the elevator boy fled from his post, and the flames soon shot upward in the wings and made escape by the narrow stairway impossible.

The screams from the imprisoned girls in the upper rows of dressing rooms came to the ears of the more fortunate below, as they rushed to the stage doors. Some stopped for a brief moment, thinking to give aid, but the clouds of smoke, growing denser and denser, forced them to flee. Their escape even then was miraculous.

**CHORUS GIRLS DRAGGED AWAY.**  
Those who were singing on the stage

escaped early. Two of their number, who had fainted, were carried by the others and were revived in the alley in the rear of the theatre. In a terrified and hysterical group the girls clustered in the narrow passage that runs from Dearborn to State street.

Some had sisters and all had friends in the blazing building. The bitter cold pierced them through and through, for they were clad only in their thin stage gowns, with necks and arms exposed. Nevertheless, they had to be dragged from their station in the alley and into neighboring stores.

The blackened bodies which choked the aisles and stairways, the lines of policemen and firemen carrying limp forms from the building, the overtaxed hospitals, the rows of dead and dying in the surrounding buildings, which were thrown open to the sufferers, tell briefly the tale. Only a few of the terrifying incidents will ever be known.

The first seconds of the rush for life among those in the audience were quiet, according to those who live to tell the tale. Few, if any, in that throng realized what was to come. They thought only of themselves as they pushed and struggled for every inch as they advanced toward the exits.

**HEADLONG RUSH FOR SAFETY.**  
For an instant the stairways leading from the balcony were a mass of struggling people, with scores behind constantly pushing closer and fighting to get out. Those in the van, unable to keep their footing, fell headlong.

Those behind fell over their prostrate forms, crushing and suffocating them. The scene was then a bedlam. Women and children were in the majority in the fighting crowd and their shrieks of fear mingled with the groans of the injured and the prayers of supplicants to God.

Women seized their babies in their arms, frantically clung to them, beseeching ears that were deaf to entreaty to save them from the terrible fate impending. Had those appealed to been so disposed, they could not have given the assistance so pitiously besought. In the last hope, born of desperation, scores of those in the balcony climbed to the railing and leaped to the pit of the theatre, many feet below. Their bodies were found long afterward, when the smoke had cleared away and the firemen could grope their way with lanterns into the place.

The dense smoke quickly rose to the top of the building. To a score of those who had sought to jump from the gallery the smoke was kind, for it brought death quickly. Three women were found hanging over the rail, their faces distorted with agonies of death.

**FROM A DOZEN SOURCES THE ALARM WENT TO FIRE HEADQUARTERS,** but before the vanguard of engines wheeled into Randolph street a dense crowd had gathered in front of the theatre. The firemen were quick to act, but hundreds of bodies were already motionless within the walls of the playhouse so recently opened.

An awe-stricken crowd stood fixedly as those who had been nearest the doors rushed out, their eyes wild with fear. These yelled fire at the top of their voices, and the cry was taken up by the crowd and carried far into busy State street and the other avenues of commerce.

None realized at that minute what had occurred. Each man asked his neighbor if there had been loss of life or injury. Not until the first blackened and limp body was borne to the arms of a policeman did the importance of the disaster begin to dawn on those in the street.

In fifteen minutes nineteen dead bodies were carried out the Randolph street entrance. Then they came so fast that all count was lost.

Thompson's restaurant was at once thrown open for temporary use as a hospital. The long tables offered excellent means of service, and upon them the bleeding, burned and moaning were laid.

Within a block are a dozen great buildings occupied almost exclusively by physicians, and in a remarkably short time a large number of them came to give voluntary service to those in distress. They saved the lives of scores of women and children, frenzied with pain, who would have died in the street.

Every hospital in the city hurried ambulances to the scene, and with them every surgeon who could be spared. They were as nothing, though, compared to the need. Two and three, and in many cases even more, were huddled into the ambulances and hurried off to the hospitals, where kinder attention could be given them.

**MOST OF THOSE IN THE ORCHESTRA ESCAPED.**  
The great majority of those who had occupied orchestra seats escaped with their lives, though scores were badly hurt in the rush. Some were knocked down, and with broken limbs were unable to rise.

They were left to die with a number of women who fainted from fright. With these bodies were found the corpses of those who had leaped from the balcony and gallery.

In the exits of the balcony and galleries the greatest loss of life occurred. When the firemen went to remove the bodies they found a hundred or more piled in a mass in each place. The clothes were torn completely away from some of the bodies. Here and there a jewelled hand protruded from the pile. All the faces were distorted with pain.

From beneath one mass there suddenly came the moan of a woman. Trembling hands plunged their way into the tangle of human forms, and with a mighty effort pulled to the surface the woman. The blackened lips parted, and a fireman bent over her to catch the words.

"My child, my poor little boy, where is he? Oh, do bring him to me."

Again the lips parted.  
"Is he safe? Tell me he is safe and I can die."

"He is safe," the fireman muttered, and all knew his reply was best. She died, and her body was lifted with those of hundreds of others in that one spot.

The calamity was so overwhelming that the firemen and the policemen, who were the first to reach the upper parts of the house, could not realize its astonishing extent. They began by dragging a body or two from the terrible piles at the head of the stairways, as if they did not know the piles were made of human bodies.

Gradually the full significance of the catastrophe dawned upon them. All the lights of the theatre had been extinguished. The lanterns of the firemen cast only a dim glow over the piles of dead. From the bodies arose small curls of steam. The firemen had drenched the piles before they knew they were made up of human corpses.

Then the work of taking out the inanimate forms began. There were constant appeals for more help. The bodies of little children, torn and bleeding, were tenderly lifted, each by a fireman or policeman, and carried to the street below. Two or three men were needed to bear the heavier burdens.

Every now and then a form faintly breathing was dragged out of the pile. These were handled with even more tenderness than the others as they were carried down the marble stairway of the gilded foyer. Now and then a faint groan was heard coming from the bottom of the pile. This was the signal for renewed and frantic efforts on the part of the rescuers to untangle the human mass.

In the balcony, scattered about the aisles and among the charred seats, were found many bodies. One mother, clasping her child, was found kneeling as if in prayer, with her back to the stage, from which had come the death-dealing sheet of flame. She had protected her child from the flames but the little one was dead in the arms of its mother. As the work of rescue progressed dozens of blankets were brought, and the bodies were carried down in these.

The scene, immediately after the fire was got under control and the work of rescue began, was appalling. At the gilt and lined of the theatre, all the silks and plushes, all the rich hangings, all the frescoes, had been wiped out. The flames from the stage had swept the entire theatre and left their blight everywhere. The upholstery on many of the seats was still intact, though. But for the failure of some one to act, when action meant life for hundreds, only a few might have perished. The thin sheet of asbestos that could have saved all failed.

**RELATIVES OF THE VICTIMS ARRIVE.**  
In a remarkably short time men whose wives and children had gone to see "Mr. Bluebeard" reached the scene. It was a hopeless task to try to find their loved ones. Through the tiers of dead and dying in the buildings all about men and women searched with frenzied faces. Now and again a searcher would find one for whom he looked. When the dead was found the searcher knelt in prayer.

**THE SCENE IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRE.**  
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**ROBBERY OF THE DEAD.**  
Amid even such sad scenes the pick-pockets were busy. The police kept watch as best they could, but the ghoul snatching many purses from the dead and dying and wrenched rings from the fingers that could no longer offer resistance.

Several of these men were caught in their work. They received at the moment punishment all too light for their crime. Only a few were arrested and taken to the police station, where they will be held to await the course of the law.

Eddie Foy, star of the company, his son, and all the people of the "Bluebeard" company got out of the theatre. It was said that the audience was one of the largest that had attended a performance of "Mr. Bluebeard." A side entrance on the west side of the house, it is said, was locked, and a stampede of those who tried to get out that way followed. A panel in a window close by was broken, but only one at a time could get out that way.

**EDDIE FOY, THE STAR, TELLS HOW IT STARTED.**  
Eddie Foy, star of the company, said after his escape: "The fire began in the middle of the second act. It was when the moonlight scene was being played. A spark from a broken wire shot into the flies and the flames were started in the rear of the stage. The stage is unusually wide, and there was so great a draught the flames spread rapidly. They soon had attacked all the scenery in the rear of the stage. I never saw flames spread so quickly."

"When the fire first began, I went to the footlights, and to prevent alarming the audience, I said there was a slight blaze and that it would be better to go out quietly. Then I stepped back and ordered the asbestos curtain down. This, when part way down, refused to go further, and thus an additional draught was created. This swept the flames out into the auditorium and I knew the theatre was doomed."

I hurried back on the stage and aided in getting the women members of the company into the alley. Some of them were in the dressing room and were almost overcome before they could get to the stage and to the doors. When I saw all were out I hurried to the hotel. There was no chance to change my costume."

The work of rescuing was begun slowly, but as soon as it was once started it progressed rapidly. Aside from the policemen and firemen, many city and county officials, as well as leading business men, aided. County Commissioner William Hale Thompson was among the first to help. He carried out more than half a score of bodies. M. S. Davidson of the Underwriters' Association carried out ten.

James Markham, private secretary to Chief O'Neil, as soon as he learned of the condition of affairs, telephoned to every hospital in the city which has an ambulance asking that it be offered in service in removing the injured and dead, and also called upon a score or more of undertakers to send their wagons to the scene.

**RELIEF FROM A MEDICAL COLLEGE.**  
William A. Dyche, business manager of

the Northwestern University Medical College, when he heard the cries of alarm in the theatre, and saw the actresses fleeing through the rear, mustered a relief corps of the faculty and surgeons in the vicinity, who were on hand almost at the time when the climax of the panic was reached.

"Looking from my windows into the valley of death in the ruins of the theatre, I estimate that from 300 people are there dead," said Dr. Dyche. "This is a conservative estimate."

The window of Dr. Dyche's room overlooks and commands the best view of the theatre. Those carts were quickly emptied and used for taking away victims. Marshall Field & Co. sent hundreds of blankets to be used in caring for the dead and injured.

More than twenty bodies lay for a long time in the old Tremont House unidentified. Twelve persons were carried into Bullard & Gormully's store, where they died within ten minutes from the poisonous gases they had inhaled. Most of those who were suffocated were in the balcony, where they were crowded together in the rear of the burning plush seats when they caught fire from the curtain, which fell forward as it was burned from its fastenings.

**HEROIC WORK OF STUDENTS.**  
Great loss of life was prevented and many lives were saved by the heroic rescue work of the students, faculty, janitors and workmen in the Northwestern University building.

The rescue work of the people in the top balcony was effectively done by the people in the university building. The platform of the theatre fire exits on the top balcony was directly opposite the third floor of the university building. This was the signal for renewed and frantic efforts on the part of the rescuers to untangle the human mass.

In the balcony, scattered about the aisles and among the charred seats, were found many bodies. One mother, clasping her child, was found kneeling as if in prayer, with her back to the stage, from which had come the death-dealing sheet of flame. She had protected her child from the flames but the little one was dead in the arms of its mother. As the work of rescue progressed dozens of blankets were brought, and the bodies were carried down in these.

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While the heartrending appeals for help rose high above the din inside the theatre, and while the awful fight for mastery was being made on the small iron platform, two huge iron doors, which up to that time had held the flames inside, burst open and a wave of fire swept upon the mass of humanity.

With shrieks, the twenty or more were swept from the platform. One woman nearest the outside fell headlong to the pavement, alighting upon her head. In a moment a pile of human beings was heaped upon her. Taylor says he believes all in that terrible crush were killed.

**GIRLS IN TIGHTS ON THE STREET.**  
The chorus was compelled to dress in the cellar. Many of the women were in the dressing rooms when the fire started. Exit from the cellar was cut off by heavily barred doors. The men were forced to break them open. During this delay many of the girls received painful burns.

The girls were forced into the street wearing their tights. They took refuge in the Union Hotel and the Sherman House.

Viola McDonald, one of the most beautiful chorus girls on the stage, was in tight when the cry of "fire" rang through the theatre. She turned to the girl next to her and said:

"I'll not go out on the street in these tights if I am burned to death."

She then ran down stairs to a dressing room to put on her skirt. She got into the skirt and then heard a crash overhead. She found her egress barred by fallen and burning timbers. She was the last person to leave the stage part of the theatre without injury. She was hauled out through a coal hole by three brawny firemen.

The last of the bodies taken into the old Tremont building were removed at 7 o'clock to-night. Firemen are still working by calcium light, taking the dead from the balcony. Bodies were found sitting straight up in the seats, where persons had fainted from fright and been suffocated by smoke and gases.

**WORK OF IDENTIFICATION DIFFICULT.**  
Only a small number of the dead have been identified by relatives. Identification in most cases has been by clothing. Hundreds of weeping persons cannot find their missing ones because of the crowds. In the morgues there is a constant stream of horrified mourners passing in and out, some having found their own among the victims, and others hastening sorrowfully away to seek elsewhere for loved ones.

**FORGOTTEN TRAGEDY.**  
A coroner's jury, which included the friends or relatives he permitted to inspect the bodies at the morgues for two hours. This was done to give the undertakers an opportunity to arrange the bodies and so expedite their identification. He said to-night that he had summoned a jury of six prominent men to inspect the remains to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock.

**ESTIMATES FROM THE MORGUES.**  
An estimate of the number of dead at the different morgues is as follows: Jordan's, 16; Madison street, 100 inside and 75 more in wagons on the outside; Rolston's, 22; Adams street, 75 inside and 100 in wagons in Adams street; Buffon's, 1772 Washburn avenue, 50; County Morgue, 10; Gavin's, 228 North Clark street, 25; Sheldon's, 230 West Madison street, 25.

Three wagonloads, each containing from eight to twelve bodies, were taken to each of the latter two undertaking rooms, when accommodation was not to be had downtown. Many of the dead are also at the morgues at the Samaritan, St. Luke's and Mercy hospitals.

**ESCAPE OF THE CHORUS GIRLS.**  
Plotted to a Coal Hole and Fifty of Them Taken Out by Firemen.

CHICAGO, Dec. 30.—In the basement of the theatre when the fire started, Maggie Levine was in charge of twelve girls who were preparing to appear in the scene entitled "The Hunters." When Miss Levine heard the cries of fire and the sounds of the commotion following over her head she shouted, "My God, girls, what can be the matter?"

A moment later a panic-stricken crowd of more than a dozen girls were struggling for their lives. Smoke rolled down through the trap doors in suffocating clouds and almost obliterated the dim light from the mountaineers. Dixie-Marlowe, Dot Downing, Zaza Belasco and Marie Janette were knocked down and trampled by their sister chorus girls and the few men in the chorus. Dixie-Marlowe was so much overcome by the smoke that she was unconscious for the time being and had to be carried out.

James Gallagher, a member of the men's chorus, took command of the frightened and half-suffocated girls and instructed them to take hold of one another's hands. He took the lead and grasping the foremost of the girls by the hand led her way through the basement from the stage to the front of the theatre building, where he reached the coal cellar under the sidewalk in Randolph street.

With a stick he forced the coal hole covers off and this sufficed to signal the firemen that help was wanted. Ladders were lowered and each of the fifty girls and their male companions were drawn out of the basement.

A Hart, one of the minor employees, was barely able to talk as he fell out of the stage entrance into the street, his clothing torn, his face bruised, and spitting blood from the crushing he received on the head stairway. As soon as he was able to talk he said:

"We were in the middle of the second act, with a full chorus singing the 'Moonlight Song' when an electrical flash blew out, a tiny spark of flame communicated with an inner curtain and the blaze started. The singers, trained for such an emergency, kept at their work in order to give the audience a chance to retire without a panic."

"An attempt was made to let down the asbestos curtain. It stuck, one end failed to work. Then there was a scramble for the dressing rooms, which are a tier from the basement to the top of the

building and to the extreme west wall of the structure. They were without windows except the few on the alley at the north end. Efforts to secure clothes were abandoned on account of the dense smoke from the burning scenery, and the crowd made for the exits on the ground floor.

"Many rushed to the elevator. It, too, was stuck. Whether any one was in it or not, I did not stop to know. With a dozen others of the employees, I formed a life line from the stairway to the west stage entrance, and in that way reached as many of the chorus women as we could, as they rushed by screaming and panic-stricken. This did not last long, as we were driven out by the smoke and got into the hall at the bottom of the stairs and the small entry room at the west stage entrance."

"I said a few prayers, and you may depend upon it that I thought I would be dead in a few minutes. The scene was terrible. I was in the middle of a mass of fighting men and women, all struggling to reach that little door. The smoke was driving us from the body of the building to that exit. How I ever got out I don't know. It was a mix-up and fight for life for all of us, and the pressure from behind almost crushed my ribs."

"The last I remember on the inside was some one yelling, above the din of all other screams and yells: 'Go to the north entrance.' A great many behind me turned from where they were to follow that voice from within the cloud of smoke. How many got out I don't know. But a moment or two later, nearly fainting, I was tossed out backward through that little door."

Father McDonald of the Holy Name Cathedral, in company with S. E. Carroll, came along Dearborn street, when he got the shrieks of the chorus girls who tried to get out of the theatre, reached them. Father McDonald and Mr. Carroll rushed into the alley and saw four girls trying to get out through a coal hole back of the stage of the theatre. The priest and his friend rescued the four women, who were taken to their homes. Their names are Violet Young, Dora Selfe, Alice M. Bartlett and Dottie V. Goodman.

**LIVERY DRIVERS SAID NO.**  
Strikers Refused to Aid in Driving the Injured From the Fire.

CHICAGO, Dec. 30.—According to W. D. Moore, who agreed to send all his carriages for relief of fire sufferers, the livery drivers flatly refused to drive them to the theatre to help in the work. Frederick W. Job telephoned to Mr. Moore, proprietor of a livery stable at 2021 Washburn avenue, asking that he send his carriages. Mr. Moore assented and later went to the union headquarters, told the drivers congregated there that he had donated his rigs and asked them to man them. He said they emphatically refused to do so.

**WOMAN'S STORY OF THE HORROR.**  
In All the Heaped-up Dead Not Five Were Seen, Mrs. Noy.

CHICAGO, Dec. 30.—Katherine Kenney Brooks, a well known woman newspaper writer, tells this story of the fire:

"A pile of children and men and women four feet deep and fifteen or twenty feet square, a mass of crushed humanity; arms and legs and headless trunks; that was the first thing I saw, and over all the sickening smell of burned human flesh. What appealed to me most were the children, little boys and girls—boys in knee breeches and girls in short skirts and with braids down their backs—little ones who a few moments before had been listening to the fascinating story of 'Bluebeard.'"